

CLASSIC DRIVER

Rolls-Royce Wraith: When darkness comes

Lead

When twilight falls in Vienna, look carefully and you might see him - the new Rolls-Royce Wraith as he haunts the silent streets. We accompanied him on his ghostly wanderings...

Necromancy is a tradition at Rolls-Royce

In the footsteps of the Phantom and the Ghost comes a new spectre: the Wraith. Necromancy is a tradition at Rolls-Royce - it was in 1938 that the first Wraith rolled through the streets of Britain, but the new spook on the block is no fleeting apparition, not with a length of some 5.3 metres and a large-scale price tag topping £235,000. But why are we even talking about the vulgar subject of money? This is a Rolls-Royce, after all, and those who buy one rarely need to ask such irrelevant details.

Two-tone with a twist



The Phantom might be the most impressive of the Rolls-Royce range but the Wraith, gleaming in front of us in the light of a Viennese street lamp, is arguably the most elegant, with Chief Designer Giles Taylor's fastback design a simple yet strong statement. As with a large sailing yacht, the shoulder line runs from the front to rear of our test car in its deep blue Salamanca paintwork, with the lightweight, Silver Jubilee hardtop seeming to float above it. This is two-tone with a twist. The interior, too, could hardly be more coherently equipped: from the shell-white leather with navy blue, to the rosewood and piano black lacquer and rosewood. And at the witching hour, we'd also recommend turning on the headlining's own starry sky.

Dynamic, but not sporty



From Vienna, our route the next morning takes us through the misty forests of Styria, where a well-bred *gentleman's GT* might enjoy a little sport. The Rolls-Royce Wraith is the most powerful model in the history of Rolls-Royce, with a 624bhp 12-cylinder engine boasting 800Nm of torque, but even Rolls-Royce (or perhaps especially Rolls-Royce) would sternly avoid the word 'sporty'. The Wraith doesn't want to be a Bentley; cornering should be luxurious, a swift glide but nothing too overt. If you want, however, you can fly from 0-62mph in 4.4 seconds and hear the engine distantly, as a dull roar. Nothing too aggressive.

A ghostly mystery solved



We gradually solve the mystery of how to coax the best from the 2.3-tonne Wraith on twisty sections of road: gently, with the lightest pressure on the pedals and only fingertip corrections to the steering. The latest Rolls-Royce is no swaggering GT car, and it needs to be driven not like a bull, but like its namesake, a wraith.

Photos: Barry Hayden

Gallery

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